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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 9 July 2003, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. SHARMA (Nepal)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Mr. Sharma (Nepal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL IN THE INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOMES OF AND FOLLOW-UP TO MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/57/48; E/2003/67, 83 and 87)

Mr. SHIMIZU (Japan) said that his delegation welcomed the successful conclusion of the activities of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. There was a growing need to follow up and implement the internationally agreed goals in the economic and social fields. To facilitate the achievement of those goals, virtually all of which had been the result of tough negotiations in the international community, it was necessary to rationalize the processes used for their implementation and follow-up.

The number of meetings should be reduced, greater coordination and coherence should be achieved among United Nations bodies and the role of the Council should be strengthened. As human and financial resources were limited, activities would have to be prioritized. The Council could play a pivotal role in providing guidance in that respect. A multi-year programme of work would be extremely significant in that context.

Mr. MALEMPRE (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that, in the context of its active participation in the mechanisms of the United Nations system, particularly the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the High-Level Committee on Programming (HLCP), UNESCO had already acted on some of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits (E/2003/67), particularly with regard to the improvement of relationships with the specialized agencies. For example, UNESCO had been working closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to follow up the commitments

made at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and it was cooperating with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other concerned agencies to prepare a draft programme and budget for 2004-2005 relating to the implementation of the Dakar Framework for Action and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Fruitful discussions had been held within the CEB and the HLCP to determine specific UNESCO niches and modalities of cooperation with other agencies. Although significant progress had been made in ensuring the coherence of the different approaches towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular with regard to poverty eradication, further efforts were needed to intensify synergies. The general framework of action undertaken to achieve the MDGs, in particular at the country level, involved the use of different "tracks", including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and the preparation of national reports. Modalities for more substantive inputs should be established in view of the wide array of issues and agencies involved.

Ms. BRETT (Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)) said that she wished to make a number of points in relation to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. First of all, while greater coherence, coordination and cooperation between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were desirable, it should not be forgotten that the decision-making structures of those institutions varied widely. The widely representative and democratic nature of the United Nations, the only multilateral institution with an in-built provision for the participation of civil society, should not be changed to reflect that of the Bretton Woods institutions. However, to retain its relevance, the United Nations should continue and increase its reform efforts.

Secondly, while she welcomed the fact that so much emphasis had been placed on the MDGs, she was concerned that individual conference outcomes were being absorbed into them and subsequently lost. For example, the only target under MDG3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women was to reduce gender disparities in primary and secondary education.

Although the education of girls was critical, it was important to address the inequalities faced by women in other areas as well. The inclusion of the provisions from world conferences was critical for successful outcomes in economic, social, cultural and political policy-making.

Thirdly, the efforts that had been made to address the issue of indicators were welcome. Indicators were highly political and potentially subjective but were one of the only ways that existed to ensure that conference goals were being met. It was regrettable, however, that civil society had not been asked to participate in the process. Many civil society organizations had developed excellent indicators and had been conducting studies using scientifically based data for many years. Their experience would be of use to the United Nations.

Fourthly, as the Economic and Social Council played such an essential role in the process of implementation and follow-up, significant changes should be made to enable it to fulfil the role envisioned for it in the Charter of the United Nations. No distinction should be made between economic and social issues, on the one hand, and peace and security, on the other, as economic inequity, lack of political representation and inequality due to race, religion or ethnicity were the foundations for violent conflict. A strengthened Economic and Social Council, acting as a true counterpart to the Security Council, would enable the relationships between those elements to be considered.

Fifthly, it was disappointing that the resolution failed to refer adequately to the role of civil society in the follow-up to the conferences and summits. The role of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mentioned in the earlier text, had been deleted from the final document.

Lastly, she called on Member States, particularly those with the resources to do so, to endorse multilateralism, to work within the parameters of the United Nations and of international law and to provide the United Nations with the funding needed to implement the conference outcomes and goals.

Ms. BLOEM (Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO)) said that, at the United Nations conferences of the 1990s, NGOs had played an important role in shaping an ambitious worldwide agenda. Despite their diversity, NGOs had found that they shared common interests and a capacity for

consensus building. Although their participation in and access to conferences had varied greatly, their overall input and influence had been substantial. On many occasions, CONGO had facilitated NGO participation in an integrated way.

Her organization welcomed the messages contained in the Secretary-General's report (E/2003/67) and in the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (A/57/48), that the time had come to move from commitments to implementation and that all follow-up should consist of regular reviews and the measurement of progress and not the renegotiation of past commitments. It further welcomed the idea of an overall structure in which the Council played a major role and was seen as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination. However, it would have liked to see a more explicit recognition of the vital role that civil society and NGOs played in monitoring and implementing commitments at all levels, not least at the grass-roots level.

One of the most important recommendations to emerge from a recent NGO forum on rural development and poverty eradication was the need to muster political will for a shift in paradigm to a genuine bottom-up approach that balanced top-down decisions and took into account the special circumstances of specific groups - including indigenous peoples, women, young people and the elderly - who should be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of every programme undertaken by Governments on their behalf.

A coordinated approach at the national level would facilitate coordination at the international level. It would also help to identify missing indicators and to harmonize existing ones. She took it that NGOs were included in the reference to "all relevant stakeholders" made in the recommendations by the United Nations Statistical Commission (E/2003/83). Her organization was working closely with a high-level panel of experts that was conducting wide-scale consultations in order to be able to submit a set of recommendations to the Secretary-General on civil society participation in the United Nations system. It had also recently become an informal partner of the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) outreach initiative. It would continue to support and develop technical cooperation and partnership between NGOs and the United Nations.

Mrs. MOLINA FAIDUTTI (World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)) said that she had been pleased to read in the Secretary-General's report (E/2003/67) that the role of NGOs should be encouraged in the integrated and coordinated implementation of conference outcomes. She had been especially delighted to note that the "We, the peoples" initiative remained high on the United Nations agenda.

The MDGs should pave the way for deeper, ongoing cooperation between the United Nations, regional offices, Governments and NGOs. Civil society could contribute immensely to the achievement of the Goals and the objectives contained in the Millennium Declaration. Much more should be done to ensure its involvement, particularly in terms of awareness raising. At the core of the policy and institutional reforms endorsed in the Millennium Declaration was a commitment to ensuring that the United Nations served the needs and hopes of peoples everywhere.

It was important to involve young people in the processes established for the implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits. Past experiences of youth participation in the work of the United Nations had been extremely favourable. The United Nations system should continue to provide opportunities for dialogue between Governments and representatives of youth organizations in consultative status with the Council. After all, young people were the future and would be responsible for carrying projects through. Her organization had implemented that idea by creating a new global youth movement for the United Nations, known as WFUNA-Youth.

Ms. LUBIN (International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS)) said that the participation of NGOs in United Nations conferences had varied enormously according to their access opportunities, the location of the meetings and the attitude of the presiding officer and the bureau. There had been little consistency in the rules and regulations governing such participation and relatively little desire on the part of certain presiding officers to learn from past experience. On several occasions, however, including the Durban Conference and the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, informal meetings had been held with the representatives of NGOs to work out satisfactory procedures to enable them to express their views. Furthermore, at the eleventh session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in 2003, the role of Major Groups, including NGOs, local authorities

and the private sector, had been greatly facilitated by the Chairman and his Bureau who had made it possible for NGO representatives to participate throughout. There were no guarantees that similar tactics would be adopted in the future unless such practices were institutionalized.

NGOs could be valuable allies in implementing governmental commitments at the international, national and local levels. International NGOs - such as IFS - often had structures in place that involved each level. NGOs should be able to become more involved in evaluation and monitoring at the local and national levels. As things stood, almost all of the indicators being considered were statistical. Many NGOs had significant practical experience of the use of local social indicators to evaluate the success of their projects and in preparing evaluation reports for donors. Governments should therefore approach such NGOs for assistance in preparing their reports to the United Nations. Independent reports by NGOs could contribute greatly to the implementation of government commitments.

In conclusion, she said that her organization would lend its support to the efforts made to act on the new understandings reached at the high-level segment to eradicate poverty in rural areas.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.